



Celebrity Series of Boston

CELEBRITY SERIES
GRATEFULLY ACKNOWLEDGES

2018-19
SEASON SPONSORS

**AMY & JOSHUA
BOGER**



Celebrity Series of Boston



BOSTON
SYMPHONY
ORCHESTRA

Friday | March 15, 2019 | 8pm | NEC's Jordan Hall

Kirill Gerstein piano
Thomas Adès piano

*Presented by the Celebrity Series of Boston in association with
the Boston Symphony Orchestra*

Claude Debussy *En blanc et noir*
Avec emportement
Lent. Sombre
Scherzando

Igor Stravinsky *Symphony of Psalms*, arranged by Dmitri Shostakovich
I. Exaudi orationem meam
II. Expectans expectavi Dominum
III. Laudate Dominum

Witold Lutosławski Variations on a theme by Paganini

INTERMISSION

Debussy *Lindaraja*

Thomas Adès Concert Paraphrase on *Powder Her Face*, for two pianos

Maurice Ravel *La Valse*

Mr. Gerstein appears by arrangement with CM Artists,
with recordings available on the myrios classics label.

Mr. Adès appears by arrangement with Alec Treuhaft LLC.

Performance sponsored in memory of Blanche & George Jones

2018-19 Celebrity Series Season Sponsors Amy & Joshua Boger

Celebrity Series of Boston is supported by Massachusetts Cultural Council, a state agency.

Notes on the program

The two-piano suite *En blanc et noir* (“In black and white”) of *Claude Debussy* (1862-1918) emerged from a late burst of creativity the composer enjoyed in the summer of 1915. After that, his health quickly deteriorated, and he succumbed to cancer less than three years later. These final years were difficult for Debussy, not only due to illness but also due to anger and anxiety caused by the First World War, and amid the furor of wartime Paris in 1914 and early 1915, he had managed to write almost nothing. After decamping to a villa in Normandy for the warmer months, however, he found his voice once again and was able to turn his feelings into music, quickly writing a clutch of masterpieces for chamber groups and piano, including *En blanc et noir*.

Each of the suite’s three movements bears both a dedication and an epigraph, reflecting the people and the thoughts foremost in his mind—and in the music. The first movement, marked “Avec emportement” (“With passion”), is indeed passionate but also troubled, at times romantic and sweeping, at others terse. Its epigraph, a seeming indictment of those unwilling or unable (as Debussy himself was) to join France’s struggle against Germany, is a fragment from the libretto of Gounod’s *Roméo et Juliette*: “One who stays in place and does not dance quietly confesses to disgrace.” The dedication is to conductor and composer Serge Koussevitzky (who would become the BSO’s music director a decade hence), whom he had visited in Russia in 1913. The second movement, half war scene and half elegy, directly addresses the European conflict. Dedicated to the memory of Lieutenant Jacques Charlot, a nephew of Debussy’s publisher who had been killed in action, it bears a lengthy inscription from 15th-century French poet François Villon’s *Ballad against the Enemies of France*. Amid the fierce, growling music providing a literal depiction of warfare, Debussy weaves quotations from the German Lutheran hymn “A mighty fortress is our God.” But there is some hope—just before the end, a faint, gentle suggestion of *La Marseillaise*, as if carried on the wind from a distant bell tower. The concluding section is dedicated to Stravinsky, whose Parisian ballets, especially *The Rite of Spring*, had dazzled Debussy. The influence of that athletic, wildly uninhibited score is apparent throughout this brief movement, which was given the epigraph “Winter, you are but a villain,” from a poem by Charles d’Orléans.

Debussy’s brief, rarely performed *Lindaraja*—which opens the second half of this program—stands as the composer’s first work for two pianos and first work in a “Spanish” style. Composed in 1901, it was never published during Debussy’s lifetime, finally appearing in print only in 1928. Named after a balcony in Granada’s picturesque Alhambra palace complex, it points the way toward Debussy’s *La Soirée dans Grenade* (from the 1903 suite *Estampes*), both in inspiration and in its three-against-two rhythms and dignified yet sensual character. It also likely looks backward, however, to Ravel’s *Habanera* for two pianos, which had so intrigued Debussy at its 1898 premiere that he asked to borrow the score afterward. Comparatively straightforward and naive next to Ravel’s more stylized, shadowed dance, Debussy’s *Lindaraja* has more in common with the crystalline, latticework structures and scintillating bursts of color that were to come several years later in his *Préludes*.

The *Symphony of Psalms* by *Igor Stravinsky* (1882-1971) is one of the many works by great composers of the day commissioned by Serge Koussevitzky and the BSO for the occasion of the orchestra’s 50th anniversary in 1931. In fact, if it were not for the commission’s stipulation that the resulting work was to be a symphony, Stravinsky would likely not have given the piece that label, which poorly describes his fascinating and unconventional music in three movements for chorus and an orchestra heavy on woodwinds and brass, and including two pianos, but entirely lacking violins and violas.

In 1929 and 1930 when he was writing the *Symphony of Psalms*, Stravinsky was in the midst of both his neoclassical compositional period and a personal rediscovery of religion—specifically the Russian Orthodox faith in which he was raised. The music clearly reflects these two influences, combining the directness and contrapuntal emphasis of the former with the reverence and relative austerity of the latter. The three movements proceed from one to the next with increasing ambition and scale. The first, hardly more than a prelude, is restless and weighed down by a sense of foreboding—reflecting its text, which depicts a supplicant in search of forgiveness. The middle movement takes the form of a double fugue, conjuring the appropriate mixture of gratitude and wonder to match its own psalm testifying that God has answered the faithful’s prayers. The symphony then ends with an elaborate *Alleluia* movement that sets almost the entirety of Psalm 150 and outlasts the first two movements combined. To elevate the enthusiastic but plain text, Stravinsky deploys a variety of styles, both episodically and in combination, from driving brass and percussion to singing lyricism to hushed tranquility.

Throughout the original orchestral version, Stravinsky’s unique instrumentation plays a fundamental role in creating the work’s striking atmosphere. As so often in the composer’s music, the prominently used woodwinds and percussion (and in this case the two pianos), combined with piquant harmonies and angular rhythms, provide an incisive bite and keep the listener slightly on edge. Meanwhile, the lack of violins and violas creates a hollow orchestral sound that skews high and low, leaving the choral voices to fill in the middle. The effect is unsettling and mystical—the loneliness of humanity at the mercy of forces beyond its understanding. Dating from the late 1930s, the obscure two-piano transcription by Dmitri Shostakovich (1906-1975) is fascinating because it fundamentally changes that atmosphere. Delivering just the notes without the instrumental color (or the text!), the transcription is at once both simpler and more intricate, dazzling the ear less but bringing into sharper relief the exquisite polyphony and complex top-to-bottom harmonic structures.

Paganini’s catchy, quicksilver Caprice No. 24 in A minor, the last of his virtuosic set of such works for solo violin, has become a touchstone of the repertory in large part due to the inspiration it has provided later composers—as source material to be transcribed for other instruments or as the basis for sets of variations. By the time Polish composer *Witold Lutosławski* (1913-1994) wrote his *Variations on a Theme by Paganini* in 1941, he was following in rather intimidating footsteps, notably those of Brahms and Rachmaninoff, both of whom had written large-scale, brilliant variations on the same tune—Rachmaninoff less than a decade earlier. Lutosławski, who wrote his two-piano version for casual performance in the cafés of occupied Warsaw where he played to scrape together a living, made no attempt to match those expansive flights of invention,

instead writing something halfway between a transcription of the original Caprice and a set of original variations. Paganini's melodies, structures, and pacing remain intact, but Lutosławski alters their color and balance through his own harmonic sensibility and scintillating explorations of pianistic texture. The effect is like hearing the original music transcribed for piano and then reflected through a series of funhouse mirrors—the familiar elements are still recognizable, but what draws the attention are the riotous distortions.

Thomas Adès's first opera, *Powder Her Face*, is a musical setting of the scandalous affair of the Duchess of Argyll's 1963 divorce and all the salacious accusations and revelations that arose from it. Its eclectic musical language, which achieves dramatic force and a modern sensibility by the assimilation of and seamless transition between a wide variety of styles and atmospheres, inspired rave reviews upon its premiere in 1995 and established Adès (b.1971) as one of the greatest contemporary composers of opera. About the concert paraphrase on *Powder Her Face*, a piano transcription assembled in 2009 of material from the opera, the composer has written the following note:

"For the concert paraphrase I have taken four scenes from the opera and freely transcribed them as a piano piece. The opera's libretto, by the novelist Philip Hensher, paints the portrait of a Duchess of a certain age at the end of the 20th century and the end of British aristocratic influence. In the opera, the Duchess' grace and glamour are figured in the music by a certain virtuosity which encouraged me to feel that parts of the music would translate into a piano Paraphrase rather in the manner of Liszt or Busoni.

"The first scene is Scene One, my 'Ode to Joy,' here the Duchess's perfume, *Joy* by Patou. The second scene in the Paraphrase is Scene Five, "Is Daddy Squiffy?" The third scene is Scene Four, the aria "Fancy being Rich!" The Paraphrase ends with the eighth and final scene of the opera and the aria "It is too Late," in which the dead Duke returns as Hotel Manager to evict the Duchess from the room in which she lives, and the closing Tango in which the room is made ready for the next occupant."

© 2018 Jay Goodwin/BSO

To honor Johann Strauss II, the "Waltz King" who died in 1899, **Maurice Ravel** (1875-1937) began a work entitled *Wien* ("Vienna") in 1906. He shelved it at the time, but he revisited the concept in 1919 to fulfill a commission from the dance impresario Serge Diaghilev. He completed the orchestral score, recast as *La Valse*, in 1920, and he also arranged versions for solo piano and two pianos. Ravel played the two-piano version for Diaghilev, who rejected it, declaring, "It is not a ballet; it is a portrait of a ballet," a comment Ravel never forgave.

The single-movement composition follows a basic scenario outlined by Ravel in the score: "Swirling clouds afford glimpses, through rifts, of waltzing couples. The clouds scatter little by little; one can distinguish an immense hall with a whirling crowd. The scene grows progressively brighter. The light of the chandeliers bursts forth at the fortissimo. An imperial court, about 1855." The one undeniable constant is the waltz, ceaselessly pulsing its three measured beats through lovely melodies and grotesque disturbances.

© 2018 Aaron Grad

Kirill Gerstein piano



Pianist Kirill Gerstein's natural versatility and curiosity have led him to explore a wide range of repertoire ranging from Bach to Adès. Following his world and New York City premieres of Thomas Adès's Concerto for Piano and Orchestra with the Boston Symphony Orchestra, he gives the concerto's European premiere with the Gewandhaus Orchestra of Leipzig, again with the composer conducting. Gerstein and Adès also perform the composer's *In Seven Days* with the London Philharmonic and Los Angeles Philharmonic and give duo recitals in New York and Boston. In 2018-19, Mr. Gerstein performs with the London Symphony under Sir Mark Elder, in China with the Shanghai and Guangzhou symphony orchestras, with orchestras throughout Europe and the U.S., and in São Paulo, Brazil. Recitals include those in London, Stuttgart, Lisbon, Singapore, Melbourne, and Copenhagen, and chamber music concerts with the Hagen Quartet, Veronika Eberle, and Clemens Hagen in Lucerne. Mr. Gerstein's recording of Scriabin's *Prometheus: The Poem of Fire* with the Oslo Philharmonic and Vasily Petrenko was reissued in fall 2018. His live recording on myrios classics of Busoni's Piano Concerto with Sakari Oramo conducting the Boston Symphony Orchestra was released earlier this month. Other releases include Tchaikovsky's piano concertos 1-3 with Bychkov and the Czech Philharmonic; Liszt's *Transcendental Études*; "The Gershwin Moment"; "Imaginary Pictures," coupling Mussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition* with Schumann's *Carnaval*; and a recital disc of works by Schumann, Liszt, and Knussen. Kirill Gerstein was brought up in the former Soviet Union; he moved to Boston at age fourteen to become the youngest student to attend the Berklee College of Music. He studied with Solomon Mikowsky in New York, Dmitri Bashkirov in Madrid, and Ferenc Rados in Budapest. His honors include the Gilmore Artist Award, which provided funds for him to commission works from Timo Andres, Chick Corea, Alexander Goehr, Oliver Knussen, and Brad Mehldau. A committed teacher and pedagogue, he taught at the Stuttgart Musik Hochschule, 2007-2017, and from autumn 2018 as part of Kronberg Academy's newly announced Sir Andrés Schiff Performance Program for Young Artists.

**Celebrity Series of Boston presents
Arts for All! community programs...**



As part of Celebrity Series of Boston's vision of a community of Greater Boston where the performing arts are a valued, lifelong, shared experience, Kirill Gerstein gave a masterclass last week at New England Conservatory.

Thomas Adès, CBE piano



Now in his third year as artistic partner of the Boston Symphony Orchestra, composer/conductor/pianist Thomas Adès was born in London in 1971. Last week he led the BSO and Kirill Gerstein in the world premiere of his Concerto for Piano and Orchestra at Symphony Hall. His most recent opera, *The Exterminating Angel*, premiered at the 2016 Salzburg Festival and has also been performed at the Metropolitan Opera and the Royal Opera House, London. His opera *The Tempest* was commissioned by and first performed at the

Royal Opera House in 2004, with a new production at the Metropolitan Opera in 2012. His first opera, *Powder Her Face* (1995), was written for the Cheltenham Festival and the Almeida Theatre, London. Orchestral commissions include those from the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, Berlin Philharmonic, Carnegie Hall, the New World Symphony, Berliner Festspiele, BBC Proms, Los Angeles Philharmonic, Royal Festival Hall London, and Boston Symphony Orchestra. His catalog also includes numerous celebrated chamber and solo works. As the BSO's artistic partner he leads the orchestra in Boston and at Tanglewood, performs chamber music with the orchestra's members, and directs the Festival of Contemporary Music at Tanglewood. He coaches piano and chamber music annually at the International Musicians Seminar, Prussia Cove. As a conductor, Mr. Adès appears regularly with orchestras on both sides of the Atlantic, and in Australia. This season he leads the Orchestre de Paris, Britten Sinfonia, and Leipzig Gewandhausorchester. Besides his own works, he has conducted such operas as *The Rake's Progress* and the world and European premieres of Gerald Barry's *Alice's Adventures Under Ground*. Recent piano engagements include solo recitals at Carnegie Hall and London's Wigmore Hall and concerto appearances with the New York Philharmonic. This season includes a solo Janáček program, Schubert's *Winterreise* with Ian Bostridge, and duo recitals with Kirill Gerstein. Mr. Adès' honors include the Grawemeyer Award for *Asyla* (1999), the Ernst von Siemens Prize for *Arcadiana*, and the British Composer Award for *The Four Quarters*. His recording of *The Tempest* (EMI) won a *Gramophone* award; the DVD of the Metropolitan Opera's production was awarded the Diapason d'Or de l'année, "Best Opera" Grammy Award, and ECHO Klassik Music DVD "Recording of the Year." *The Exterminating Angel* won the World Premiere of the Year at the International Opera Awards. In 2015, he was awarded the prestigious Léonie Sonning Music Prize.

From the Celebrity Series of Boston archives...

Kirill Gerstein made his Celebrity Series of Boston recital debut in January 2014; pianist Thomas Adès made his Series debut in October 2016 in recital with tenor Ian Bostridge, also a co-presentation with the BSO. Each appears for the second time tonight.

Celebrity Series first presented a duo piano recital in its second season, when Celius Dougherty and Vincenz Ruzicka performed together in Jordan Hall in October 1939. That first piano duo program also included Debussy's *En blanc et noir*. The most recent duo piano recital presented by Celebrity Series featured Daniil Trifonov and Sergei Babayan in Jordan Hall in March 2018.




Celebrity Series of Boston

PERFORMANCE SPONSORED
IN MEMORY OF

Blanche & George Jones

